

Tough Choices or Tough Times **Presented During KASA Conference**

On Thursday, July 19, during the Kentucky Association of School Administrators (KASA) 38th Annual Conference, OCTE Area Supervisor Mary Stratton led an education session entitled, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. In a united effort, she was joined by Marion Co. Schools Superintendent Roger L. Marcum, Marion Co. High School Principal Taylora Schlosser and Marion Co. Area Technology Center (ATC) Principal Laura Arnold. Their session was presented from the standpoint of identifying the core problem in the American education system and what the Marion Co. School District is doing to address workforce development and economic prosperity for its community.

**Photo at right (l to r):
OCTE Area Supervisor Mary
Stratton, Marion Co.
Superintendent Roger L.
Marcum, Marion Co. High
School Principal Taylora
Schlosser and Marion Co. ATC
Principal Laura Arnold during
Tough Choices or Tough Times
session at the 2007 KASA
Conference.**



***Tough Choices or Tough Times* is a report by the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce – a bipartisan group of individuals including business, industry and civic leaders, cabinet secretaries, college presidents and elected officials. It was introduced in December 2006.**

The report, commissioned by the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), identifies challenges facing the education and training systems in America and provides recommendations for major changes.

According to the report, “The core problem is that our education and training systems were built for another era, an era in which most workers needed only a rudimentary education. It is not possible to get where we have to go by patching that system. . . We can get where we must go only by changing the system itself.”

During her opening remarks, Stratton held up a copy of *Tough Choices or Tough Times* and introduced the commission’s “Analysis of the Challenge,” by saying that “we are living in a changing world.”

Photo at right: OCTE Area Supervisor Mary Stratton holds up a copy of *Tough Times or Tough Choices* during her opening remarks.

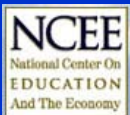


Utilizing documented information from the study, Stratton showed a PowerPoint presentation identifying economic and education problems that currently exist in the United States and the commission's prescriptions for change.

In the competitive global marketplace, will employers pick U.S. graduates over graduates from other countries? According to the report: "They won't unless

- we can match their academic performance and
- exceed them in creativity, innovative capacity and ability to learn quickly."

Research and information point to education and training systems that do not adequately prepare students to compete in today's world and Stratton provided the audience with an overview of the commission's proposal for "*Building A New System for the 21st Century*" that includes the following "First" principles:



Recruit teachers from the top third;

Let students go on when ready;

Reprogram funds for higher payoff;

Create lean, performance-oriented management systems;

Create incentives for schools to perform;

Give schools room to innovate;

Create a fair financing system so all kids have a good shot at success;

Reform our nineteenth century governance system for 21st century results;

Fewer, much higher quality tests;

Create the same opportunities for working adults.

More information can be obtained by visiting the NCEE Skills Commission Tough Choices or Tough Times web site:

<http://www.skillscommission.org/executive.htm> to view the executive summary or http://www.skillscommission.org/standard_ppt.htm for the standard PowerPoint.

Marion Co. Schools Superintendent Roger L. Marcum stressed the importance of the commission's findings by relaying that his district had cooperatively engaged in making necessary changes over the past school year because of growing business and industry needs and concerns:

Marcum:

“In Marion County, business and industry representatives, the Lebanon/Marion County Chamber of Commerce, the Lebanon/Marion County Office of Economic Development and Marion County Board of Education decided even before the release of this report to work collaboratively and proactively to address many of the concerns and issues raised by the report.

“Why? Because the reality of the need to provide quality educational opportunities in career and technical education to develop the workforce to support and grow our existing business and industry and recruit new business and industry to our community became increasingly apparent.

“The future economic well-being of our community will be largely determined by our ability to provide an educated workforce capable of meeting the demands of an increasingly technological 21st century. With the assistance of the Kentucky Department for Workforce Investment and the



Roger L. Marcum

Marion Co. Schools Superintendent
Roger L. Marcum



“The National Center on Education and the Economy has recently released a report that should be required reading for every Kentucky educator and school board member.

The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce’s *Tough Choices or Tough Times Report* is a reality check of the brutal facts and challenges we face in the 21st century as a community, state and nation to compete in a global economy. Marion County has decided to make the Tough Choices rather than experience the Tough Times!”

Roger L. Marcum

Marion Co. Schools Superintendent

KASA President (2006-07)

KASA Immediate Past President (2007-08)

KY Assoc. of School Superintendents President (2007-08)

Council for Better Education President (2005- Present)

Office of Career and Technical Education, Marion County has experienced a renewed interest in career and technical education by students, parents, educators and the community.

“With a much more positive perception of the expectations for students and the opportunities available for those who choose this pathway for postsecondary education and the workforce, the quality and quantity of opportunities has increased dramatically in less than a year.”



Photo (l to r): Schlosser, Arnold and Stratton listen to Roger Marcum sharing the positive changes taking place in the Marion Co. school district.

As a step to provide increased communication between the Marion Co. High School and area technology center, Taylora Schlosser became involved by serving as the mentoring principal to Laura Arnold, who was hired last summer as the new Marion Co. ATC principal.



“We had a common goal of changing the view of technical education and we worked together with teachers, parents, students and the community to change this perception. We wanted the two buildings to become one staff with a common goal of all students graduating with the skills necessary to be successful after high school.”

**Taylora Schlosser
Principal
Marion Co. HS**

Schlosser:

“The mentoring relationship went beyond the two of us working together to include the entire high school and district administration. We have common goals and we understand that our teachers must work together for a successful outcome. Mrs. Arnold has been a valuable and participating member of our administrators meetings.

“We all believe that coordinated efforts to effectively communicate goals and objectives have been vital in addressing issues, resulting in positive outcomes. As the high school principal, I understand that the ATC must be a part of our school environment in order for students to receive those skills and Mrs. Arnold understands the ATC must support the high school with respect to content and high stakes accountability.

“Mrs. Arnold and I have worked together and will continue to work together as one to change the perception of technical education and to ensure the future of Marion County is served through both schools because we have a mission: Growing Our Future...One KNIGHT at a time!”

For Arnold, the combination of efforts has provided her with an opportunity to begin her tenure as principal with the help and support of the Marion Co. school district, as well as the Office of Career and Technical Education. At the local level, there is a sense of unison within the district even though Arnold's faculty and staff are funded through the state's KY Tech school system.

Arnold:

"The school district and ATC are working jointly to address the needs of the local community because we all understand that our students need to develop a variety of skills in order to be successful as adults in the work place.

"The partnership among the school district, business and industry communities, and ATC is essential for continued economic success in Marion County. We are all at the table identifying the challenges placed before us so we can collectively articulate and provide solutions to stimulate change.

"As evident from the research in *Tough Choices or Tough Times*, we have to provide unique learning experiences specific to the interests of students. By providing high quality technical education and skills training career pathways, Marion Co. students will be well trained for a competitive future workforce."



Laura Arnold
Principal
Marion Co. ATC

In Praise of *Tough Choices* or *Tough Times*

“This proposal is radical? Yes. Hard to achieve? Of course. Essential? Absolutely. Our nation's schools are failing to educate our children, and that has to stop - else we condemn our own kids to ever lower incomes. We must act - now!” - William E. Brock, Former Secretary of Labor, Reagan Administration, *Tough Choices or Tough Times* report reviewer.

“This penetrating, scary analysis and these astute, far-reaching recommendations amount to *A Nation at Risk* for the next generation, a brave, clear call for top-to-bottom reforms in U.S. education. While overturning plenty of creaky applecarts, *Tough Choices* sketches a bold and efficient new vehicle for equipping 21st century Americans with the skills and knowledge they will need—and that the nation needs.” -Chester E. Finn Jr., Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and President, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, *Tough Choices or Tough Times* report reviewer.

“Anyone who hopes to hold a job in the next several decades should read - if not memorize - this extraordinary report.” - Norman R. Augustine, Retired Chairman and CEO, Lockheed Martin Corporation, The National Academies’ Committee on Prospering in the Global Economy of the 21st Century, *Tough Choices or Tough Times* Commissioner.

Footnote: To address many of the issues being discussed at the national level, members of the Marion Co. School District decided to take action by working collaboratively to make sure all high school students have a post-secondary plan and by identifying local employment needs in the community.

A Marion Co. Partners Marketing Committee was created to discuss the importance of marketing career and technical education in Marion Co. as it directly relates to image, perception, quality of student, low enrollment and a higher demand for skilled employees by local industry. Formed in January 2007, the marketing committee has developed a mission, goals and strategic commitment.

Many projects and activities have been developed and were set into motion prior to the closing of the 2006-07 school year. There has been increased publicity for technical education and increased community support.

Accomplishments:

- * creation of the Marion Co. ATC National Technical Honor Society.
During its first year, 18 students were inducted into the NTHS.
- * hiring of career counselor for 2007-08 school year. The position is funded by both the Marion Co. and Washington Co. school districts and the Marion Co. ATC.

“While much has been accomplished to positively market career and technical education in the Marion Co. School District, there is more to do. The OCTE, MCATC and MCPS partnership will continue to make significant contributions in making our plans become reality,” says Marcum.